If, in *The Europeans,* Gertrude marries the Europeanised Felix Young for possibilities of refinement, Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* achieves refinement in Europe through tragic conflict, suffering, and awareness. Refinement, which implies equability, clear comprehension, and awareness, is possible only in the context of unlimited possibilities for experience; and so it is that the heroes and heroines of James enact their quest in Europe unceasingly. James's central figures are 'full vessels of consciousness' on whom 'nothing is lost". Endowed with intelligence, imagination, sensibility, perception, and a spontaneous moral sense, they expose themselves, eagerly and confidently, to the impact of living experience.

Isabel Archer is the first American girl in the novels of Henry James to launch upon the quest for refinement through a conscious living of her experience. In the light of the refinement which she finally achieves, her return to her husband is not in the least improbable. The mistake she commits and the anguish, misery and disillusionment she suffers become insignificant when compared with what she gains by way of insight into human nature, and an awareness of man's predicament in a hostile world of evil, of conventions and traditions, of superficial manners and treacheries. To err is human, and James's 'super.subtle fry' are no exceptions to this great truth, Their morality, intelligence, imagination, and sensibility are no proof against the follies of fallen men. The Jamesian protagonists, too, are victims of bewilderments, uncertainties and confusions like their erring brethren.

The suffering of James's heroes and heroines is of a kind which is peculiar to the highly perceptive, the highly sensitive, and the highly intelligent. Isabel Archer, like Christopher Newman, acquires a refinement of moral insight, which results in her acceptance of life as it really is. If suffering is illuminated by understanding, it is better that one suffers in order to understand. Understanding is refinement of consciousness raised to the level of vision. The quest for a

refined mode of consciousness and existence thus gives a meaning and purpose to the human condition. The problems of the Archers and the Maggies are thus the problems of ail perceptive and intelligent human beings.

Isabel Archer is an intelligent, imaginative, and sensitive girl whose passion for refinement prompts her to entertain romantic notions of life. In her innocence and ignorance, she imagines the world to be